

California Wine: Pinot Noir Is The Other White Wine

by George Yatchisin



I'm not the first to say it, but it really is time to defeat that tired old belief that you should only serve white wine with fish. Pinot noir, a red, can have a subtlety that plays well with seafood, especially if you opt to play up some pinot flavors in your fish dish. For instance, often people note a mushroom essence in pinot -- so if you cook with some mushrooms, that will help your dish and your wine work well together. Note: you don't have to pair wines with food so they harmonize; sometimes it's good to have different songs singing at your table for a fuller chorus of flavor. That said, pinot and mushrooms are a match made in culinary heaven.

That's particularly true when you match shiitakes with salmon. Pan cook the fish with butter, shallots, the mushrooms (and let them sit, forsaking that temptation to stir, in the pan for longer than you think is possible, so they get a good crisp), some thyme, and then pour about an ounce or so of the pinot onto the fish and 'shrooms after you've flipped the fish. You can do a full-on cream sauce, too, with pinot, but as delicious as that is, this is California and that only means more time at the gym the next day. Let your calories come from the wine, which will pair wonderfully with the salmon, giving the dish a bright splash of fruit and acid. Best of all, if you believe salmon is as cliché as a kale salad, this preparation and the wine accompaniment will spice things up.

As for what pinot noir to drink, that's a matter of how much taste you want for how much money. Pinot is a notoriously difficult grape to grow, sort of like the friend you adore who is temperamental, easily susceptible to sickness, and hard to be with too often. Be glad you're not trying to grow pinot grapes and realize that's why it's often hard to find ones at a cheaper price point that still taste like, well, pinot. Because when it's good, and I'm not just talking French Burgundy good but American pinot good, it's a lithe, lovely marvel, with everything from cherry to rose to berry with occasional hints of herbs, tobacco, and even loam in the sense you're out in a freshly dug garden and the world smells right and good.

For some varied selections, you can start with [Bogle Vineyards](#) 2011 Pinot Noir California, widely available at \$10. Bogle has been known as a value play for decades now, and this wine lives up to that reputation. It's not a complex bottle (by that I mean, you go, "Hey, cherries," but then don't get tons else from it), but for the price, it's certainly quaffable. Moving up the price ladder, [Bishop's Peak](#) 2012 Pinot Noir San Luis Obispo County costs about \$17, but you do get something for spending more. This second label production -- that is, a wine of a more accessible in price and style by renowned Central Coast winery Talley Vineyards -- was hailed by noted critic Antonio Galloni as "bright, focused, and quite pretty. Sweet red cherries, mint, flowers, and spices are all very much alive in a candied, racy pinot."

And then if you want to splurge, you can go for something like a [Dehlinger](#) 2007 Pinot Noir Russian River Valley at about \$45. You will want to drink this one older as it's more complex and can age longer than the more monochromatic, less expensive wines that are meant for immediate pleasure. It has more time in barrel, is made from fruit the most specific place - all these things tend to add up to a better wine, and yes, that is why they cost more. It's the kind of wine that Robert Parker's Wine Advocate raves about, saying it "boasts impressively pure fruit (black raspberries, forest floor, earth, and spice), dazzling intensity, medium to full body, a dark ruby/purple color, and an expressive, expansive mouthfeel and length. This beauty can be drunk now or cellared for a decade or more."

OK, at that point pinot noir isn't really a white wine, but if you want something wonderful with your salmon sushi and your bank account can afford it...

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